U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
NIH News
National Institutes of Health

National Institute on Drug Abuse
http://www.drugabuse.gov/

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, August 2, 2010
9:00 a.m. EDT

NIDA Contacts: NIDA Press Office
301-443-6245
media@nida.nih.gov

Leading Addiction Researcher Antonello Bonci joins NIDA to lead Intramural Research Program

Antonello Bonci, M.D., one of the world's leading researchers in neuropsychopharmacology, has been appointed the Scientific Director of National Institute on Drug Abuse's (NIDA) Intramural Research Program (IRP) in Baltimore. NIDA is part of the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Bonci is currently professor in residence in the Department of Neurology at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), where he holds the Howard J. Weinberg Endowed Chair in Addiction Research. He is known for the elegance and multidisciplinary breadth of his studies on the long-term effects of drug exposure on the brain. Dr. Bonci and his colleagues were the first to demonstrate that drugs of abuse, such as cocaine, modify the strength of the connections between neurons. This finding cast a new light on the phenomenon of drug addiction, which could now be seen as a process of maladaptive learning. This new understanding, in turn, helped explain why drug taking can often become an automatic, compulsive behavior.

"We think Dr. Bonci will bring tremendous strength to our already robust intramural research portfolio," said NIDA Director Dr. Nora D. Volkow. "His impressive background as a superb neuroscientist with strong clinical training brings NIDA an exceptional investigator committed to translational science, and will bring us closer to new and better medicines for the treatment of addiction."

"I am thrilled to be a part of one of the world's most important scientific organizations looking at the challenging problem of drug abuse and addiction," said Dr. Bonci. "I especially look forward to working with Dr. Volkow and her colleagues in the extramural program, as well as the many top level investigators at the NIDA Intramural Research Center who have been responsible for many advances in addiction science. I hope that the experience I bring as a neurologist and a translational neuroscientist will help their already impressive scientific program thrive even further."

Dr. Bonci has been with UCSF since 1998, becoming principal investigator at the Ernest Gallo Clinic and Research Center in 1999 and professor in residence in 2007. He received the Jacob P. Waletzky Memorial Award at the Society for Neuroscience in 2004, given to young scientists for innovative research in drug addiction and alcoholism. He also received the Daniel H. Efron Award at the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology in 2009 for outstanding basic and translational research.

Dr. Bonci received his medical degree at the Sacred Heart School of Medicine in Rome, with summa cum laude honors, and in 1995 he became a neurologist at University of Rome "Tor Vergata" with summa cum laude honors. Before joining the faculty at UCSF, he did postdoctoral work in 1995 at the Vollum Institute for Advanced Biomedical Research in Portland, Ore. and worked as a visiting professor in the Department of Psychiatry at UCSF in 1998. He is a member of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Drug Dependence.

Dr. Bonci replaces Dr. Barry Hoffer, who has served as the NIDA scientific director since 1996. Dr. Hoffer is stepping down from his role as scientific director to be a tenured principal investigator and chief of the Cellular Neurophysiology Section of the Cellular Neurobiology Branch of the IRP. Dr. Hoffer is currently on detail to the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

"We are deeply grateful to Dr. Hoffer for his contributions to the Intramural Research Program," said Dr. Volkow. "Under his leadership, the IRP evolved into an organization focusing on cutting-edge neuroscience research, supporting and nurturing a strong core of investigators who lead highly productive laboratories and conduct first-class research on the neurobiology of drug abuse and addiction." Dr. Hoffer is also recognized for his role as a skilled scientific mentor.

Dr. Bonci begins his new position at the NIDA IRP on August 29, 2010.

###

The mission of the Intramural Research Program (IRP) of the National Institute on Drug Abuse is to conduct state-of-the-art research on basic mechanisms that underlie drug abuse and addiction, and to develop new methods for the treatment of drug abuse and addiction. Research is supported at the molecular, genetic, cellular, animal, and clinical levels and is conceptually integrated, highly innovative, and focused on major problems in the field. The long-term goal of the research is to better understand the biological and behavioral factors contributing to initiation, maintenance, and elimination of drug abuse and addiction (and associated diseases), and to translate this knowledge into improved strategies for preventing, treating, and reducing the negative consequences for the individual and for society caused by drug abuse and addiction. An important aspect of the program is the training of young investigators and career development of more experienced investigators in basic and clinical sciences related to drug abuse research.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's new Drug*Pubs* research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or fax or email requests to 240-645-0227 or drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov. NIDA's new media guide can be found at http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide/.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — *The Nation's Medical Research Agency* — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit http://www.nih.gov.